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Rogers Events Highlight Downtown

By Teresa Moss - August 1, 2015

ROGERS -- The city was a flurry of energy Friday as organizers prepared for two weekend events highlighting amenities that could continue drawing people to the region.

Volunteers worked putting up tents and banners in a parking lot adjacent to Frisco Park for the inaugural Rogers Cycling Festival while across the street another group pulled weeds from overgrown landscaping in Centennial Park for a PopUpnwa event.

Both events are being held by Northwest Arkansas Emerging Leaders, an organization under Rogers-Lowell Area Chamber of Commerce.

The events tie into a recently adopted downtown plan prepared by Gateway Planning of Texas, said Daniel Hintz, owner of Velocity Group. Hintz was contracted by the company to assist in the downtown plan process.

“Aside from bringing a great event that attracts people downtown, these events are strategically placed to highlight assets,” Hintz said.

The Rogers Cycling Festival will showcase about 10 miles of trails recently completed at Lake Atalanta Park, Hintz said.

“This has public and private benefits,” Hintz said. “It reinforces a brand of a healthy lifestyle and downtown living. It also promotes businesses downtown like the bike shop across the street.”

GPP Cycling & Multisport Shop was moved to downtown from another location in Rogers earlier this year. Owner Kevin Whaley said he decided to move his business downtown to tap into the momentum starting in the area.

Hintz said today’s popUpnwa event will bring attention to Centennial Park and an alley behind it. Creating a buzz about these areas could also help the businesses near them, he said.

Centennial Park was constructed in 1981, said Gary Townzen, a City Council member and owner of a barber shop bordering the park. Townzen said two buildings once connected the city block where the park sits. The buildings were destroyed by fire in 1979.

The park sits tucked between brick facades. A small stage, planters and benches fill the space often overlooked by people who visit downtown.

Townzen said he and his wife planted flowers to landscape the park when it was first built and other groups have planted flowers in it in the past.

A few flowers peeked from behind weeds in the park on Friday. Katie Strickland, member of Northwest Arkansas Emerging Leaders, held open a trash bag as her daughter, Brooklynn Smith, pulled at the weeds.



Strickland said the PopUpnwa event is a way to highlight the space and show people how it could be used. She said it's possible one of the garden beds could be used for a community vegetable garden.

The 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. event will focus on the park, an alley behind it and a public parking lot connected to the alley, she said. The parking lot will be filled with food trucks. An art walk will line the alley and a band will perform on the stage.

Strickland said the event is meant to start a discussion on how the area can be used in the future.

"The event is supposed to revitalize unused places," Strickland said. "It is supposed to have a lasting affect."

Popup events are an initiative started by the national Better Block association, Strickland said. They have been used nationally to help activate unused spaces in regions, she said. It's the first held by the Northwest Arkansas Emerging Leaders Association, which plans to hold one annually in the region, she said.

Nick Dorothy, manager of Parkside Public, a restaurant near the park, said employees are preparing for a busy day. The business has been open for about six months.

A farmers market held every Saturday across the road always brings in heavier crowds, Dorothy said. It's likely the larger events will bring in even more, he said.

The cycling festival could have 300 participants, said Matt Crafton, organizer of the event for Northwest Arkansas Emerging Leaders Association. He said 200 people were registered to compete in six events planned today and Sunday. He expected people would continue to register through today.

The cycling festival runs from 7:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. today and 7 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Sunday